

Germany's first military rabbi in a century begins work

Zsolt Balla will be the first of up to ten Jewish chaplains to be appointed. See [video here](#).

Germany inaugurated its first military rabbi in a century on Monday in a ceremony at a Leipzig synagogue attended by the country's defense minister and the Israeli ambassador.

Rabbi Zsolt Balla was appointed to the role earlier this month, becoming the first Jewish chaplain to the German armed forces since the First World War.

Nearly 100,000 Jews fought for Germany in the conflict between 1914 and 1918.

The subsequent rise of Nazi Germany and its antisemitic policies forced one-time military rabbis including Leo Baeck and Jacob Sonderling to leave the country.

Few of those who remained survived to see the end of the Second World War.

Josef Schuster, the leader of Germany's Jewish community, told German soldiers that "you probably imagined an old man with a white beard, long temple curls, and a large hat."

"I can assure you that as a trained industrial engineer he knows of the difficulties when there is a problem in logistics," Schuster said, adding that as a dad of three children, "he is also used to having to throw all the planning overboard."

The 42-year-old Hungarian-born Balla remains a community rabbi of Leipzig, as well as the state rabbi of Saxony.

Up to ten military rabbis will be appointed in the coming months, officials said.

Germany's defense minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer said Monday's appointment strengthened "something which especially in light of Germany's history means a lot even though it almost sounds banal: normality.

"A normality which recognizes that Jewish life, Jews belong to Germany and that Judaism belongs to the (German army)."

She added: “We all agree: it is the responsibility of every democrat to fight anti-Semitism. And I will say very clearly: this is a highly personal responsibility for each and every one of us, also for myself.”

Source:

<https://jewishnews.timesofisrael.com/germanys-first-military-rabbi-in-a-century-begins-work/>

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